Creating Alignment with the Leadership Team Part 12

RESPECT FOR PEOPLE

The last two months we have focused on the principle of Learning Organization. We discussed how important it is to include the entire team in problem solving while transitioning the managers to coaches and the workers to learners. This month we will discuss the importance of Respect for People. This is the last principle in this series; we have saved arguably the most important principle for last.

When an organization begins a journey to continuous improvement, the following tenants must be considered. The organization must:

- Ensure no loss of regular jobs due to continuous improvement efforts.
- Make it easy for people to do the right thing.
- Provide a safe, ergonomically sound working environment.
- Provide challenging work.
- Utilize people to their optimal capability.

We have seen, in many cases, organizations' leaders being critical of the associates without first ensuring the leaders, first, are holding up their end of the employee / management relationship. The table below shows what management owes the worker before they [Management] can expect the workers to provide what the workers owe.

Management Owes	Worker Owes
Meaningful work	Engagement to operate, maintain, and improve the core process
Follow-up when tasks are given	Safely meet production rate at designated quality levels
Processes that work	Follow standards
Tools/Equipment that work	Problem solving
Standardized work instructions	
Response to problems	
Problem solving coaching	

Note: One cannot expect workers to do their part until management has first done its part!

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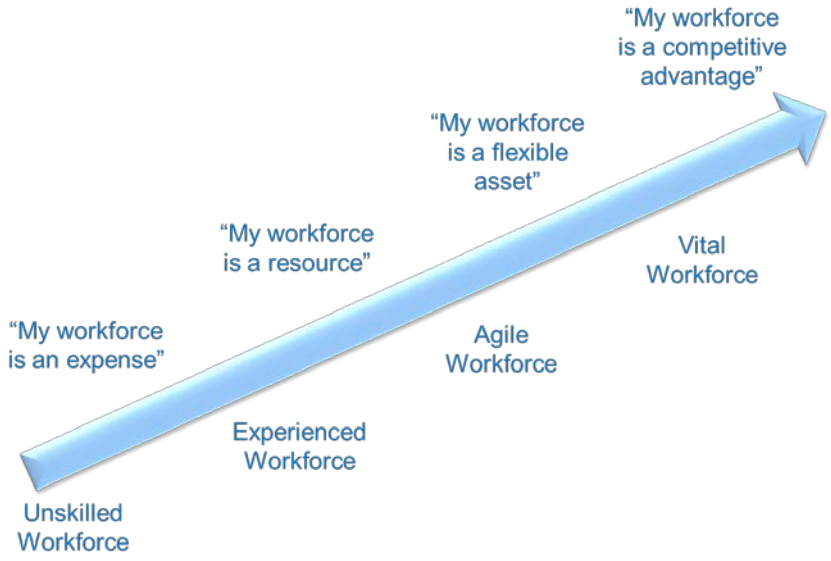
VITAL WORKFORCE

Our people will drive our progress primarily along this journey, so how we view our people will determine how successful we become along the way. If we haven't spent time developing our associates, the associates may be considered "unskilled." When workers are perceived as unskilled, those workers will be the first to be removed when cost cutting begins. I was personally a victim of this type of approach in my teenage years. The company for which I worked had a lay-off just before Christmas. They called back after Christmas to let me know I could come back to work. My response was, "No, thanks." I could not see myself working for a company that thought so little of the workers that they would lay them off at Christmas. This company still operates in a similar manner today. With the emergence of temporary labor, they have essentially shifted most of their workforce to temporary labor, which only serves to bolster the perception that they view their workers as an expense. At the opposite end of the spectrum we have what is called a vital workforce. This means we view our associates as a crucial part of our competitive advantage. If we see them as a competitive advantage, we would never consider laying them off in times of cost cutting. Instead, we would leverage them to help us get ready for the next business cycle. I am often reminded of the quote, "In time of peace, prepare for war." This is true in many cases. The graphic below shows the various mindsets and how those ideals translate to our perception of our people.



NON-BLAMING NON-JUDGMENTAL

Another key to creating the proper environment for continuous improvement is to create an environment in which each member of the team, especially leaders, are non-blaming and non-judgmental. When a problem occurs, instead of assigning blame to an individual or

department, we must focus our understanding on what happened and why it happened in order to prevent the problem from recurring. Blaming leads to fear, mistrust, and the misrepresentation of "bad news." If members of the team fear sharing bad news with the boss, they may not tell the entire story when communicating an issue. This will, in turn, inhibit the leader's ability to help solve problems. We must also focus on the issue or problem and not the person. If you have worked with Drive Inc before, you have no doubt heard us use the phase, "Hard on the problem, easy on the people." We firmly embrace this adage, and if practiced, we believe it creates an open, trusting, and communications-rich environment. This trusting environment allows "real issues" to emerge. Surfacing real issues with all relevant information will increase our problem-solving capacity.

PROBLEM RESPONSE

As we empower the team to improve the business, we must also ensure that we rapidly identify problems. Ideally, we would want to have a quick response to problems, similar to the nervous system's responses in the human body. If your hand touches something hot, your body responds in milliseconds. The body's response is to protect itself. In business, the faster we can respond the better. We can contain cost and be able to determine the root cause accurately. The further we get in time from when the problem first occurred, the less likely we are to be able to solve that problem. In some cases, we resort to "creative writing" to appease our customers when asked what happened. When it comes to business performance, reliance on data review on a monthly, weekly, or even daily basis is not sufficient. When we are discussing the previous month's performance, it is like performing an autopsy. In essence, the questions we are asking are, "Why did the patient die?" If we have the correct problem response system in place and are better at taking vital signs continuously, the question can become, "Why is the patient sick?" If we know the patient is sick, we can take measures to cure the patient (process).

If one were to ask your employees whether or not they feel respected, would his/her answer be YES? Do you see your employees as a competitive advantage? Have you developed practices that will increase engagement at all levels of the organization? If you answered NO to any of these questions, Drive Inc. can help. We have experienced professionals who can coach your team through the process of gaining alignment around this principle. For a no-obligation introduction meeting, please contact Paul Eakle at paul.eakle@driveinc.com or 865-323-3491. Stay tuned for next month's newsletter when we will discuss the next principle in this series to ensure your leadership team is aligned.